

Extended Breastfeeding Myths

MYTH: Breastfeeding a child older than a year is no different than breastfeeding a young infant.

FACT: Nursing frequency & duration varies widely from child to child after the first year. As time passes, and as the nutritional aspects of breastfeeding become less significant, the comfort aspect of breastfeeding becomes much more significant. Children also incorporate breastfeeding into their play, which can add a new dimension to the breastfeeding relationship.

MYTH: Mother's milk becomes less nutritious after the first year.

FACT: Mother's milk continues to provide substantial amounts of nutrients well beyond the first year. At some point your baby will need to take in nutrients from other sources, but mother's milk remains a valuable contribution to your child's diet.

MYTH: The immunities in mother's milk are insignificant after the first few months.

FACT: The immunities in mother's milk continue as long as nursing continues, and some of the immunities increase in concentration as baby moves toward weaning. Children who are breastfed have fewer illnesses and illnesses of shorter duration than their non-nursing peers. The American Academy of Family Physicians notes that children weaned before two years of age are at increased risk of illness.

MYTH: Extended breastfeeding makes a child overly dependent and can cause psychological harm.

FACT: On the contrary, meeting a child's need for breastfeeding fosters independence on the child's own developmental timetable. Both research and the experiences of mothers worldwide indicate that children who nurse past a year have excellent social adjustment. Per the American Academy of Pediatrics, "There is no upper limit to the duration of breastfeeding and no evidence of psychologic or developmental harm from breastfeeding into the third year of life or longer."

MYTH: Mothers who breastfeed past infancy have not learned other ways of comforting their child.

FACT: For the typical extended breastfeeding mother, breastfeeding is only one of *many* tools in her parenting toolkit.

MYTH: Mothers only continue breastfeeding past infancy for their own benefit.

FACT: A child will not breastfeed if he does not have a need to do so. A mother typically continues breastfeeding because her child is not ready to wean, and because of the continuing health and emotional benefits to her child.

MYTH: Breastfeeding mothers need to wean for fertility to return. Breastfeeding during pregnancy is not safe.

FACT: Most mothers can get pregnant while continuing breastfeeding. Breastfeeding is considered compatible with a healthy pregnancy.

MYTH: The longer you breastfeed, the harder it will be to wean.

FACT: Age has much less to do with ease of weaning than does your child's developmental readiness for weaning. Each child has his own developmental timeline for child-led weaning. If mom initiates weaning, then the closer the child is to weaning on his own, the easier it will be (for both mom and child) to accelerate this natural progression. If the child takes the lead in weaning, then this is not an issue at all.